

Coolamon College

1. INTRODUCTION

Given that Coolamon College ceased to exist as the national college for distance theological education on 31st December, 2008, this report is the final one to the Assembly.

Coolamon College, also named the National Network for Distance Theological Education, has existed from 1993. It was initially located in Brisbane, then at the Adelaide College of Divinity since 2004. In that time there have been four principals, and various staff members either part or full-time, as this agency of the National Assembly sought to achieve its vision to equip the people of God theologically for their ministry and mission. Over its life it expanded from a focus on lay education through non-award courses, to awards at all academic levels from certificate to doctoral studies, and was a source of part-time study for candidates for the Ministry to supplement their face-to-face learning, and into postgraduate and continuing education for Ministers. At the height of its work, close to 1000 students were enrolled in distance education theological studies.

2. ANNUAL MEETINGS OF COLLEGE COUNCIL

The national and networking nature of Coolamon College mainly existed through the membership on the Council of representatives of each of the Synods. Students were located in every Synod and overseas, together with writers and assessors, fulfilling the national nature of the college. Together with the South Australian members of the Academic Committee, Synod members met once per year in a face-to-face meeting and two or three other times using teleconferencing. The major purpose of these meetings was to discern the overall needs of the Church for distance theological education, and to choose priorities for development of topics and courses to match these needs, within the ability and resources provided by Assembly for the work.

Over the past triennium, theological education has been reviewed in most synods, and major changes have been made to the way the synods deliver theological education to candidates, lay people and those undertaking continuing education. This had a dynamic impact on the work of Coolamon College, through constant adaptation over the years to respond to synod requirements. As a result, during the triennium Synods ceased

to be agencies for certificate courses with students enrolling directly with Coolamon.

3. ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Ongoing development and updating of topics and courses was the task of the Adelaide based Academic Committee, which met in between the meetings of the Council. Over the triennium, the committee supported the Principal and staff in implementing the priorities set by the Council, finding new writers and assessors, and in the constant administrative changes demanded through being a member college of Adelaide College of Divinity and part of the Theological Faculty of Flinders University. Government regulations for higher education became more and more demanding, as did the requirements of the VET sector, placing increasing demands on the small staff.

4. CHANGES TO AWARDS

During the triennium, negotiations were initiated by Coolamon College for the introduction of a Masters in Resource Ministry through Adelaide College of Divinity. These negotiations were focused on providing the award through distance education, in response to the increasing need for Resource Ministers across the Church, and also inquiries from Ministers for continuing education by distance. In the final negotiations, from which the Principal was excluded, the distance form of the award was removed by the accrediting group. However, topics within the Masters level award prepared by Coolamon were able to be offered as reading topics. Several continuing education students have undertaken topics through the college towards achievement of this award, with a further topic ready for offering in 2009.

The Discover topics (non-award for individual and group study in the local congregation) have been updated and are now available in a more attractive format. These have been taken up enthusiastically by congregational groups.

Two students have completed their doctoral studies under the supervision of the Principal, Rev Dr Lee Levett-Olson, thus generating government payments for these services.

5. LICENSING AGREEMENTS

One of the major changes to the operation of the college has been the introduction of licensing agreements with the synods and some overseas agencies. Coolamon provided electronic copies of specific topics to an agency, with permission to

make them available to students for a fee-per-person paid to Coolamon. These were then non-assessable topics. Where students wished to achieve accreditation, they still needed to enrol in the topic with Coolamon and have it assessed through the normal processes. While this step can be seen to be promoting further use of Coolamon topics, the fees that were able to be negotiated meant that these agreements simply ensured that Coolamon's financial viability was further and detrimentally affected.

6. ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE REVIEWS

During the triennium, the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) carried out two reviews of the college's operation. The first was held in 2007 and resulted in the ASC affirming the work of the college, its offering of certificate courses in the VET sector, and other awards, with a recommendation that the number of topics in the certificate be reduced to those needed for the Lay Preachers Certificate. These changes were made.

The ASC then asked the General Secretary to report to the February 2008 meeting on the resources needed by the college for it to fulfil its mandate, and to review the mandate in that process. The General Secretary commissioned a consultant to undertake the review. He then reported to the ASC that Coolamon College needed more resources if it was to continue even with a modified mandate, and suggested that an alternative to providing these resources was to negotiate with Parkin Wesley College (SA Synod) for the two colleges to merge so that Parkin Wesley College would encompass the work of CC. Given that the ASC was dealing with reduced resources for the Assembly overall, it was perhaps understandable that they would decide on the latter course of action. ASC decided to discontinue funding CC from 31st December 2008.

7. ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE DECISIONS

The negotiations with Parkin Wesley College and the Synod of South Australia were successful. The agreement reached was that PWC would continue to provide two staff members to manage the distance education endeavour, given that student and government fees have covered the cost of these staff. The Assembly agreed to employ a staff member to be located in Adelaide for three years, with the major focus of negotiating with synod bodies what their distance education needs were and how they could be met. In addition the person is to act as a broker, in facilitating

sharing across synods the resources they have produced, for the benefit of the Church nationally. This staff position is still to be advertised and filled at time of writing.

8. CLOSURE OF COOLAMON COLLEGE

The closure of Coolamon College was marked by a service in November 2008, where the President, Rev Gregor Henderson gave the address. Symbolically, the Coolamon owned by the college was passed from the Acting Principal, Rev Jo-Anne Fulton, to the Principal of PWC, Rev Dr Andrew Dutney, and the staff of PWC shared in the commitment to undertake and continue the work of Coolamon College. This was a sad occasion for the staff and those associated with the College over the 15 years of its existence. PWC have contracted with the existing staff to continue in the work for at least 6 months in 2009, as the transition is successfully completed.

9. TRIBUTE TO STAFF

Coolamon College has been blessed over the 15 years by the dedication and expertise of many staff members. In particular, Rev Dr Robert Bos, the initial Director / Principal, Rev Dr Anita Mono (Acting Principal), Dr Marelle Harisun (Acting Principal), Rev Dr Lee Levett-Olson, Principal from 2003-2008 (June), and Rev Jo-Anne Fulton, Acting Principal since then. A number of people have served as educational developers and deans of students over the years, together with three different administrators. In the past triennium, the Principal reduced his salary in order to be able to employ a part-time office worker to assist the staff.

The Academic Committee and staff celebrated the appointment of Rev Dr Lee Levett-Olson as the new Principal of Nungalinga College from 1 July 2008, knowing that his work with Coolamon will be built on in this new role for the national Church and for the Northern Synod.

In addition to the paid staff, a large team of more than 100 ecumenical writers and assessors from around Australia contributed to the work of the college. These faculty members worked for a very small remuneration, with many choosing to freely offer their time and expertise.

The Church owes all of these people an incredible debt, for the way they have worked "above and beyond the call of duty" in their commitment to this important work for the Church. The high quality of Coolamon College resources, writers, assessors coordinated by the staff have

given the college (and the Assembly) a national and international reputation. May that quality long continue, as in its new incarnation the work continues through the commitment of PWC to maintain it as a national service to the Church.

Rev Jo-Anne Fulton
Former Acting Principal

Dr Marelle Harisun
Former Chairperson
Coolamon College Council